



## Prayer 101: A Beginner's Guide

(Adapted from an article by Kathleen Bryant, RSC.)

Prayer is about growing a relationship with God. If you have never had any guidance for prayer, or if you are unsure about how to proceed, here are some simple ways to begin.

Find a quiet place. Start with five minutes of listening, of just being present to God. Do this by imagining that you are sitting with an old friend. You have to say anything. Remember that you are in the presence of Someone who loves you beyond anything you could ever realize or imagine.

Make an appointment with God. Sometimes the best intentions never materialize because we get too busy or other things always seem to interfere. Write down the time and place in your calendar and honor the appointment as if it were with someone very important that you just had to meet!

Just listen. If you have a difficult time settling down to pray and you cannot imagine how this listening to God can take place, begin by listening to all the sounds you can hear outside of the room or building. If you are outside, just pause and listen to all of the sounds surrounding you. This can have a calming effect on a racing mind.

Here are some images which might help you prepare for prayer.

Be present to God:

- as if you are a child asleep on its mother's lap (Psalm 131),
- as if you are floating on your back in the ocean or a pool,
- as if sitting with a loved one with whom no words are necessary.

If you are seriously looking at religious life, you may want to deepen your sacramental prayer life. Attending daily liturgy can be a tremendous blessing for those in discernment.

### *More Suggestions for Prayer*

Take a walk at a quiet time in a relatively quiet place. Leave the personal stereo at home. Listen instead through ears filled with the sounds of God's creation...notice...pay attention. Don't try to think great thoughts or "figure anything out." Just enjoy God's gifts and be grateful.

Cultivate a habit of "putting the day to rest" each night. Look back on your day and notice how things went. For ten to fifteen minutes rewind and play back the images of the day. Do you notice anything that you didn't pay much attention to at the time? At the car wash, the bank, the store, the gym, the on ramp of the freeway. Take a personal inventory check. What do you notice there? Peace? Tugs and pulls? Unrest?

It helps to have personalized prayer spaces. Where do you meet God? Some people find that the car is often the place where God speaks to them. Some feel at one with God in the gym during their exercise class! Get to know the places and spaces in your life where you can recognize the presence of God. Take off your shoes before the burning bush as Moses did! (Exodus 3: 1-5). How? Turn off the radio in your car (or your walkman or your cell phone) for a few minutes. Make the choice to turn it off and intentionally listen. Listening doesn't mean that you hear definite words or come up with a solution to a problem. It means a coming home to self. When you check in often with your inner self, you will meet God there, get to know yourself a little better and be in better touch with who you are.

Build into your life some signposts for prayer or "triggers" for prayer. Take some ritual that is part of your daily life and attach a prayer or an attitude to it. When you look at buildings on your way around town, you might say a prayer for our city. When you make your bed in the morning, you might thank God who loves you unconditionally for the gift of another day. There are ways you can use almost any daily activity — showering or looking in the mirror, having a meal, taking a walk — as a trigger for prayer.

Take your Bible off the shelf or coffee table. Find a short passage, for example, Isaiah 43: 1. Read it slowly. Sit with the text. Don't analyze it. Imagine God speaking to you through the passage. Read it as if God is speaking to you personally. "Fear not, (your name), for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name: *you are mine*. When you pass through the water, I will be with you... Because you are precious in my eyes (your name). Fear not, (your name) for I am with you." Continue with the text. We believe that the Bible is God's word to us. It is a living word, not something written a long time ago for someone else. It is written for you, to be heard in the circumstances of your life today.

This simple method of prayer can be used with any Scripture. Some other passages that you might select for starters:

Psalm 139	Isaiah 49:13-18	Mark 4: 35-39	Romans 8
Psalm 103	Isaiah 55: 1 - 11	Luke 1: 26-38	Romans 12: 1-13
Psalm 23	Isaiah 61	Luke 5	Ephesians 1: 3-12
Proverbs 3: 3-6	Jeremiah 1:4-10	Luke 10: 38-42	Ephesians 3:14-20
1 Samuel 3:1-10	Jeremiah 29: 11-15	John 14 and 15	Philippians 4.

### *When it's difficult to pray*

If you have difficulty getting quiet to pray and are pestered by a lot of distracting thoughts try using one of the following three ways to become still:

**Breathe** - Focus on your breathing for a few minutes before you take the Scripture text. Center yourself in your body. Let go. Listen to yourself breathe in and out. Feel the breath as it enters your nostrils and goes down into your body. Let go of your anxieties, cares and concerns as you exhale.

**Listen** - If you are inside a room listen to all the sounds outside. Listen to your heart. Is there something clamoring for attention? A need, a feeling unnoticed? An inner child? Spend time listening to all that surrounds you rather than fighting the sounds as "distractions."

**Focus** - Gaze upon an image that may help you center. Focus on something like the flame of a candle, a cross, an icon, a tree, the ocean. If not an image, focus on one word: Light, Jesus, Peace. Whenever you find yourself distracted during the rest of your prayer time come back to this visual or verbal focus.

And remember it's ok to just "hang out" with the Lord in prayer as he tells us in Psalm 46: Be still and know that I am God. Remember you are in God's presence and just share with God as with a friend. That's prayer too.